CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   An apparatus for providing the status of a mailbox by an mail service provider to a calling user before making a connection between the calling user and the mail
5   service provider comprising:

        a caller-identification routine which extracts a calling user identification from a request for connection transmitted from the calling user to the mail service provider;

        a mail server access routine which requests the status of a mailbox
10   corresponding to the calling user identification; and

        a mailbox status routine which alerts the calling user if the status indicates that there is no unread message in the mailbox to allow the calling user to terminate the request for connection before the connection is made, the calling user is connected to the mail service provider after completion of the alert unless
15   the calling user terminates the request for connection.

2.   The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the mailbox status routine connects the calling user and the mail service provider without sending an audible ringing tone to the calling user if the status of the mailbox indicates there is an unread message in the mailbox.

20 3.   The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the request for connection is an ISDN message.

4.   The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the mailbox status routine alerts the calling user by sending an audible ringing tone.

5.   A method for providing the status of a mailbox by an mail service provider to a
calling user before making a connection between the calling user and the mail
service provider comprising the steps of:

5   extracting, in a caller-identification routine, a calling user identification
from a request for connection transmitted from the calling user to the mail
service provider;

requesting status of a mailbox, in a mail server access routine, using the
calling user identification; and

alerting the calling user if the status indicates that there is no unread
10   message in the mailbox to allow the calling user to terminate the request for
connection before the connection is made, the calling user is connected to the
mail service provider after completion of the alert unless the calling user
terminates the request for connection.

6.   The method of claim 5 wherein the calling user is connected to the mail service
15   provider without sending an audible ringing tone to the calling user if the
mailbox status indicates that there is an unread message in the mailbox.

7.   The method of claim 5 wherein the request for connection is an ISDN message.

8.   The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the step of alerting sends an audible ringing
tone to the calling user.

20 9.   An apparatus for providing the status of a mailbox by an mail service provider to
a calling user before making a connection between the calling user and the mail
service provider comprising:

means for extracting a calling user identification from a request for
connection transmitted from the calling user to the mail service provider;

means for requesting status of a mailbox using the calling user identification; and

means for alerting the calling user if the status indicates that there is no unread message in the mailbox to allow the calling user to terminate the request for connection to the mail service provider before the connection is made, the calling user is connected after completion of the alert unless the calling user terminates the request for connection.

10. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the calling user and the mail service provider are connected without sending an audible ringing tone to the calling user if the status indicates there is an unread message in the mailbox.

11. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the request for connection is an ISDN message.

12. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the means for alerting alerts the calling user by sending an audible ringing tone.

13. A computer program product for providing the status of a mailbox by a mail service provider to a calling user before making a connection between the calling user and the mail service provider, the computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having computer readable code thereon, including program code which:

extracts a calling user identification from a request for connection transmitted from the calling user to the mail service provider;

requests status of a mailbox using the calling user identification; and

alerts the calling user if the status indicates that there is no unread message in the mailbox to allow the calling user to terminate the request for connection to the mail service provider before the connection is made, the

calling user is connected after completion of the alert unless the calling user terminates the request for connection.